

Weekly Market Bulletin

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From Your Commissioner...

Sweet Potatoes Win In UNH Field Trial

Turkey Day leftovers finished off, Christmas trees being chosen and cut, farm buildings buttoned up for winter—time for random notes from all over. . . .

—The verdict is in on sweet potato production in New Hampshire: the plant can be successfully grown here and score well in taste testing.

UNH's Dr. Becky Grube just completed a trial of 16 varieties obtained from sources in Ontario, North Carolina and Tennessee. She found several that thrived here—Beauregard was tops—but they need warmth and a long season to produce well.

Sweet potatoes are grown from slips taken from stems rather than from eyes cut from tubers. Dr. Grube set out slips in slotted black plastic. The harvested specimens ranged from deep orange flesh to pure white, and a panel of some 40 UNH ag faculty and staff graded them satisfactory to outstanding in a tasting of 40 samples.

A limited trial on a Coos County farm taught the same lesson—sweet potatoes need at least 90 days to mature, so short-season varieties are the logical choice for New Hampshire production.

—How about a pickup truck that runs on firewood and gets up to 9,000 miles per cord? Or a lawn tractor powered by a 60-horsepower engine out of a Geo Metro car? Or a wing plow for an ATV?

These are some of the zany things found in a tabloid newspaper called Farm Show that publishes reader contributions describing imaginative shop projects they've turned out. There are also many useful things featured that farmers have dreamed up that commercial manufacturers haven't bothered to produce, and a column where readers can vent about their worst and best buys in trucks and farm equipment.

Yes, a guy in Alabama has rigged a gasifier that looks like a hot water heater so that it converts firewood into combustible gas capable of powering a Dodge Dakota at speeds up to 90 mph. Check this publication out at www.farmshow.com.

—Free barn available to a good home.

A handsome 38 by 69 barn located in Concord will be given to anyone willing to remove it. It's in good shape, having had its roof and foundation well maintained, and a former owner who lives nearby will gladly offer historical information on the structure.

Contact Dr. Jim Wolcott at 228-5780 if seriously interested.

—Another venture in developing production of natural beef in New England is taking shape in Maine. Pineland Farms has taken over the Wolfe's Neck brand and launched a feedlot operation at Fort Fairfield in far northern Aroostook County with an initial 500 head soon going to 1,000 on a corn silage-barley ration.

Pineland is funded by a foundation committed to economic development of rural Maine, and maintains an elite Holstein dairy herd near Portland.

A familiar and vexing issue confronts this Maine beef initiative: no nearby commercial slaughter plants to dress the market-ready critters. The state's last major facility, Alco Packing in Winslow, closed several years ago, leaving Pineland to haul animals over 800 miles to a plant in Pennsylvania to be killed and the carcasses to be trucked back.

—Land conservation efforts are happening on many fronts around New Hampshire. Old-line state conservation organizations, land trusts, local conservation commissions, regional preservation bodies and ad-hoc groups are actively raising money and constantly putting together deals to acquire easements on or purchase outright farmland, forests, mountaintops, wildlife habitat and other properties.

There's so much activity that UNH's Department of Natural Resources will introduce a new upper-level course entitled "Land Conservation Principles and Practices" in the spring semester.

Steve Taylor, Commissioner